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A
S E R M O N
PREACHED AT
R I C H M O N D,
I N
S U R R E Y.

2 C O R. iv. 5.

*For we preach not Ourselves, but Christ
Jesus the Lord; and Ourselves your
Servants for Jesus Sake.*

By their MINISTER
W I L L I A M C O M E R, A. M.
Vicar of K I N G S T O N upon T H A M E S.

Printed at the Unanimous Request of the Vestry.

L O N D O N:

Printed in the Year M.DCC.XLVII.

FERMON

RICHMOND

U. K. R. E. Y.

31. 4.
1. 271.



TO THE
Gentlemen of the Vestry,
AND OTHERS,
Inhabitants of *RICHMOND*,
IN SURREY.

GENTLEMEN,

IF this Sermon, which I now put
into your Hands in Obedience
to your repeated Request, shall be
found in any Degree instrumental to
the due and conscientious Discharge
of the respective Duties incumbent
on Minister and People, it will so
far have accomplished the main De-
sign

sign both of Preaching and Printing it: And I take this Opportunity again to assure you, That my chief Ambition will be to acquit myself among you so as it becomes one who professes himself a *Preacher not of himself, but of Christ Jesus the Lord, and himself your Servant for Jesus Sake.*

William Comer.

2 COR. iv. 5.

*We preach not ourselves, but Christ
Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your
Servants for Jesus Sake.*

IT is not my Design upon this Occasion
to shew, that though it be the Will of
God to instruct and convert Men by
the Assistance of Men, yet that he hath ap-
propriated the *Administration of his Word
and Sacraments* to a certain Order of Men
solemnly constituted and *commissioned* for
that Purpose; and, by consequence, that
no one ought to exercise the Office of a
Preacher in the Church of God, *except he
be sent.* — *No Man*, saith the Apostle,
*taketh this Honour to himself, but he that
is called of GOD, as was Aaron.* And so
that neither the most superlative *Learning
or Holiness*, nor any Endowments superna-
tural or acquired, nor any thing besides
B such

such a *Commission* can sufficiently warrant any Person to take upon him any such Office, or give any *Validity* to his Administrations.

Nor do I now think it needful to insist upon what hath been so well and often proved, almost to a Demonstration; *viz.* that though the Ministers of *Jesus Christ* cannot now produce such extraordinary Evidence of their Mission, as the Apostles had (there being no Reason that they should; for after Christianity was established, and the Grandees of the World were converted to the Faith, the Necessity of Miracles ceased, and the Power of them was recalled), yet however, that our Commission to *preach Jesus Christ* is very clear and unquestionable. Indeed, after the Succession of more than Seventeen hundred Years, it cannot possibly be more clear than it is, unless *the Founder of our Faith* would stretch forth his Hand from Heaven, and ordain us by immediate Revelation.

But it hath been further said, and often, by many Divines as well as others, that as the *Lawfulness* of a Minister's Commission is necessary to the *Validity* of it, so, that
the

the Concurrence of many other excellent Qualities is also necessary; and especially that the *Success* of his *Preaching* does in a great Measure depend upon the Hearer's Opinion of his Sincerity: That if we would benefit, and do People Good with our Sermons, it is expedient, if not necessary, that they should *believe* that we really *intend* it, and that our great and chief Aim is to gain Souls to Christ, and promote their *eternal Interest* more than any *secular Aims* of our own.

Nor do I now presume to diminish the Currency of this Assertion, by too nicely weighing and examining the *Truth* of it, or by shewing under what *Restrictions* it ought to be received. I willingly allow it to keep all its Credit and Esteem in the World; especially as the Apostle, who speaks in my Text, so frequently directs the Attention of those, among whom he had preached the Gospel, to the *Disinterestedness* of his *Views*, which was so conspicuous in his *Manner* of doing it.

And indeed this great Apostle, and the first Preachers of Christianity could easily vindicate themselves from the Charge of

being wholly or chiefly influenced by any lucrative Purposes in the Discharge of their Ministry. Both their Doctrine and Circumstances sufficiently cleared them from any such Imputation; they rather disclaimed all earthly Grandeur and Honour, and were exposed to *Hunger and Thirst, to Cold and Nakedness*, and *endured the Loss of all Things here*, in order to promote the Gospel of *Jesus Christ*.

But now the Case of the Ministers of Christ is very different from theirs; and the Rectitude of our Designs may not seem to stand so clear and unexceptionable, especially in the Opinion of some Men; and the Reason is plain ---- since *Kings* are become *the nursing Fathers*, — *Queens the nursing Mothers* of the Church; since Plenty and Power, and all the good Things of this World are so copiously enjoyed by some of those that *serve at the Altar*; and since they, who are the most active and able in *preaching* up the Concerns of *Heaven*, have oftentimes been the largest Sharers of Preferment and Honour *here upon Earth*: Hence our Duty and our temporal Interest joining Hands, our Piety and Policy seem
so

so much the same Thing, that it is hard to persuade some People, that our *Designs* are not wholly *selfish* and *secular*, and that the Clergy have no other *ULTIMATE Aim* in their *Preaching*, besides *saving their own Souls, and the Souls of them that hear them.*

And upon this Foundation it is, that of late our *Preaching* hath been so often affirmed to be mere *Priestcraft*; and indeed all our religious *Institutions* to be nothing else but a *Trick of State*, contrived by *Priests* to humble other People, and to advance themselves. These have been the public Declarations of some People, and perhaps the private Thoughts of many more.

How much Occasion has been given of late for such a Charge, and how far some of us may have deserved it, I shall not stand to examine; I shall only observe, that even in these Days, when among those that *serve at the Altar* many have been *dignified and distinguished* most, who were most conspicuous for their Piety and Religion; even in these Days, I say, though our Duty and Interest do go Hand in Hand, and they that

serve at the Altar do sometimes live very splendidly by the Altar; though to preach *Jesus Christ*, and shew ourselves very zealous in his Service, be a probable Means to advance our Fortunes, and gain Esteem; so that it is hard in some Cases to distinguish our Designs, and to let People see, what we do for *Christ's* and THEIR Sakes, and what for our own; yet still there are some Tokens to clear our Designs and Endeavours by; and it is not impossible, even in such Days, to prove, that *we preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ the Lord; and ourselves your Servants for Jesus Sake.*

And since Providence hath so ordered it, that I am now in some Sense more immediately related to you as your *Pastor* and *Minister*, by the *Grace* of God assisting me, for of ourselves we can do nothing; *all our Sufficiency* for these Things *is from GOD*; I say, by God's *Grace* assisting me, I shall make it my Business, in the whole Course of my Ministry, to acquit myself in such a Manner as may conduce here and for ever to *your* Comfort and true Happiness, as well as to *my own*. And to this End, as the Apostle exhorts *Timothy*, *I shall take heed*

to myself and to my Doctrine. In particular, I shall endeavour to exemplify the Saying in my Text, and to convince you all, that I *preach not myself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and myself your Servant for Jesus Sake.*

I am sensible, that the Charge a Minister takes upon him is of itself exceeding great; to be the *Stewards of God, the Messengers of the Lord of Hosts*; to publish Christ's *Laws*, to pass his *Pardons*, and *represent* his very Person; to take the Care of *many* Souls upon us, when the Value even of *one* single Soul is preferred by our blessed Saviour himself to the *whole World*: The Charge, I say, that any Minister of the Gospel takes upon him is of vast Importance and Concern; but then the Charge of such a Congregation as *this*, is of greater Concern than many others.

I must add, my Charge even *here* is attended with some Difficulties more than ordinary; of which I shall at present only mention the following.

To be obliged to come up frequently before an Audience, where I am *to undergo* the *Sentence* of a Number of Persons of

more elevated Sentiments and exalted Understandings, than is usually to be found in most other Congregations, who will be Judges and Witnesses of all my Thoughts and Expressions.

And where also I am to *succeed* Persons who have been so *eminent*, who have here acquitted themselves with so much Applause and Approbation; who enjoyed so great a Share of your Favour, and did most certainly deserve it; and who have been so *endeared* to you for many Years; and some of whose Performances in this Place have been justly admired by all, and can be equalled by few, hardly perhaps by any. This last is a very disadvantageous Circumstance to *me*, and must needs render my Labours poor and mean upon the Comparison.

These are extraordinary Difficulties for me to struggle with, and I believe it is easy to allege two or three more.

However, here is also some ground of Comfort: Because you have heard so many good Instructions from hence, and have received so many kind Admonitions; because you have so long enjoyed the Blessing of such excellent Preachers: Hence it is presumed
that

that this Place abounds also with exemplary Instances of a more than ordinary Progress in Piety and Religion; of good Principles, great Graces, and candid, humane, and Christian Dispositions. I must not suppose that this Pulpit hath in vain been so often filled with such distinguished Ornaments of it; God forbid!—I hope the contrary, for their Sakes as well as mine and your own.

And hence upon this Prospect I might reasonably enough even rejoice and think myself happy to succeed such considerable Predecessors.

I hope to enjoy the Fruits of their Labours: By their Means my Business is facilitated to my Hands; for after a capable, and, for the most Part, intelligent Congregation have been so long under the Force of approved Eloquence, and have been strongly impressed with good Principles, and, so well persuaded, are *become* good Christians, methinks it should be no such hard Matter to *keep* them so: At least I undertake to endeavour it by *preaching Jesus Christ, and myself your Servant for his Sake.*

I now

I now therefore proceed to observe to you, **FIRST OF ALL**, what I take to be the *Meaning* of this Expression; what it is to preach *Jesus Christ*.

SECONDLY, To acquaint you with my *Method* in doing this. Which I hope may be sufficient to convince you, that I do *preach Jesus Christ, and not myself*.

THIRDLY, Having laid before you a short Scheme of *my Duty*, I shall crave Leave to say something to you concerning *your own*.

FIRST, then, I am to observe what it is to *preach Jesus Christ*.—Now to *preach Jesus Christ*, is no other than to *preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. To give you the *History* of your Blessed Saviour; How He, the Second Person in the Holy Trinity, *who is GOD blessed for ever, came down from Heaven for us Men, and for our Salvation*, took our Nature upon him, and *was made Man*; and, after he had revealed the good Pleasure of his heavenly Father, and introduced the true Religion, and taught the World their Duty, he offered himself a *Sacrifice*.

crifice for our Sins, and suffered Death, even the shameful Death of the Cross: How he rose again the third Day from the Dead, broke loose from the Grave, and is now exalted at the right Hand of GOD; how at the last Day he shall come down from Heaven again, and summon all the World to appear before him; and then, accordingly as they have done Good or Evil, accordingly as they have behaved themselves here, they shall be sentenced to a State of Happiness or Misery for ever.

In short, to *preach Jesus Christ*, is to set forth the great Mystery of Man's Redemption, that stupendous Scene, which *the Angels themselves desire to look into*; 'tis to explain the *Doctrines* which Christ taught us to *believe*, and press the *Duties* which he *injoins* us to *practise*; 'tis to display the *Means* of Grace, and the *Conditions* of our *eternal Happiness*; the great Things that our Saviour hath done *for us*, and what he requires that we should do *for ourselves*.

This is the general Meaning of *preaching Jesus Christ*; and as this is our *Duty*, so 'tis my sincere Design: And the *Manner* of my doing it, is the

SECOND Thing which I proposed to shew you — *We preach not ourselves*, says the Apostle, *but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your Servants for Jesus Sake.*

Now to acquit myself fairly in this Case, the best Method I can think of, is to have the Example of my blessed Saviour and his Apostles always before my Eyes; to take the same Method in my Ministry, which *Jesus Christ* himself seems to have done, when he was here upon Earth, and which I believe in my Heart would take again, were he to come down from Heaven, and be placed in the same Circumstances I am placed in.

This is the *Method*, which, by the *Grace* of God, I design to take; and I presume you will have no Cause to question it, if I proceed according to these four following Particulars.

First of all — If *I preach* up those *Doctrines*, and press those *Duties* most, which all Christians are most concerned to practise and understand.

Secondly, If I am most frequent and earnest in exposing and reproving those Sins, which

which are most pernicious, and most prevailing.

Thirdly, If I do this in a plain and familiar Manner, so that People of the most ordinary Capacity may be sensible of their Duty, and of their Sins: And

Fourthly, If I do it with Freedom and Impartiality, without flattering some, or fearing others, or gratifying any selfish Humour or Design of my own.

Such a Procedure in my Ministry I hope will be sufficient to make good my Pretensions to the Character of *preaching Jesus Christ*, and not *myself*. And,

I. I shall make it my Business, in the Course of my Ministry, to *preach up* those *Doctrines*, and press those *Duties* most, which all Christians are most concerned to practise and understand.

And here 'tis certain the *Doctrines*, which Christians are *most* concerned to believe and consider of, are such as have the greatest Influence on our Lives and Conversations.

Such as, the astonishing *Love of GOD in the Redemption of the World by our Lord Jesus Christ*—the *Immortality of the Soul*—the *Certainty of a future Judgment*

ment — the unspeakable *Happiness* of good Men in a future State, and the intolerable *Misery* of those who are *sinful* and *profane*; and then, as for particular *Duties*, be sure they do oblige us *most*, which do *most* conduce to the *Honour* of GOD, and the *Peace and Salvation* of Men; which adorn our Nature, and improve our Souls; which dispose and qualify us *here* for that *Happiness* we hope to enjoy *hereafter*. And now these are all our sociable Virtues; such as *Obedience to our Governors* in Church and State; *frequenting the Service of the Church*; *receiving the Sacrament*; *Charity, Temperance, Humility, and Forgiveness of Injuries*: These are the *Doctrines* and *Duties* which I am chiefly to put you in mind of; they are such as *Christ*, and *his Apostles*, and holy Men in all Ages, have been most conversant in; they are indeed the great *Means*, by which we are to pass hence from a *State of Grace* to a *State of Glory*. But,

2. Another Branch of my Duty, as I take it, is to be *most frequent* and earnest in exposing and reprovng those Sins, which are *most pernicious*, and yet *most prevailing*. — Cry aloud, says the Prophet, and spare not;

lift up thy Voice like a Trumpet, and shew my People their Transgressions, and the House of Jacob their Sins, especially those Sins which tend most to the Dishonour of God, and the Undoing of Souls.

Now here it must be observed, the Sins which are greatest in *themselves*, and most pernicious in their *own Nature*, are not always those Sins which we are most obliged to expose, and preach against, because they are not always so *fashionable*, and so *prevailing*, as some other Sins are; and, by consequence, the Souls of our People are not so much endangered by them.

As for Instance, Atheism is doubtless more destructive in itself than Heresy; Idolatry is more heinous than Bitterness or Envy; and it is a much greater Sin to murder a man, than it is to cheat or plunder him. However, Heresy and Envy, Injustice and Dishonesty, and perhaps our much smaller Sins, have destroyed more Souls, especially in this Nation, than Atheism, Idolatry, and those greater Crimes, have done; because they are more suitable to our Circumstances and Inclinations, and are become most current and popular.

And

And hence it is our great business to consider and examine, what those Sins are, which are *most pernicious* and *prevailing* in that *Place* which is committed to our Charge, and to encounter these above any other. To preach against *Luxury*, where people have hardly any Bread to eat; against *Usury*, where people have no Money to lend : to confute those *Errors*, which Time itself hath long since confuted ; and to inveigh against those *Sins*, which it is hardly possible for People to commit ; is extremely idle and impertinent. This is to present a *Stone*, when the *Child asketh for Bread, and, when he desires a Fish, to give him a Serpent*. Such a Preacher may convince some of his Audience, that he is ingenious; and better Judges, that he is ridiculous; but no Man, that his principal Aim was, the Conversion of Sinners !

And hence, I say, it is our great Business to expose and guard against those Sins most, which do most endanger our People's Souls, such as they are most prone to commit, and most unwilling to forsake. Several Sorts of People are addicted to several Sorts of Sins, and our Measures must be taken accordingly. There are some Sins, which are, as it were,
adapted

adapted to particular *Places* and *Times*, and perhaps there are none more prevailing in our own than *Hypocrisy* and *Pride*, *Drunkenness* and *Debauchery*, *Profaning the Sabbath*, *Common and False Swearing*, *Slander* and *Evil-Speaking*, *Disobedience to Governors*, *Infidelity* and *Lukewarmness in Religion*.

These seem to be the most common and crying Sins of our Age, and, by consequence, if we would *preach Jesus Christ*, and *not ourselves*, it is our great Business to reprove and to expose them.

3. In discharging my Ministry, I propose to be exceeding *plain* and *familiar*; so that People of the meanest Capacity may understand me, and be made very sensible of their Duty, and also of their Sins.

It is certain, if a Man did *understand all Mysteries and all Knowledge, himself*, yet, if he does not express himself so, as that his Doctrine may be understood, that his People may lay them *up* in their *Hearts*, and lay them *out* in their *Lives and Conversations*, he becomes, says the Apostle, *as sounding Brass, or a tinkling Cymbal*. — *How shall People hear*, says St. Paul, unless they have

a Preacher? and I may add, How shall they understand, unless his Preaching be plain and intelligible, adapted to their Capacity, and leveled to their Apprehensions?

It is presumed by some People, and such too as are no ordinary Judges, that, of all the Books which have been published for many Years, there are none which have done more Good than the *Whole Duty of Man*; and the Reason of it seems to be, because it is composed in a *Method* and *Stile* so *familiar* and *plain*. Here the Extent of our *Duty*, and Nature of *Sin*, is so clearly expressed, that all, who read it over, can hardly help understanding of it, if they would.

Indeed, to address in the Language of the *Court*, and to speak in the *Stile* of the *Theatre*, is doubtless most *popular* and entertaining, especially to such People as pretend to a superior Understanding, and are apt to place a great Part of their Religion in hearing the Sermon, and applauding the Preacher.

But are Men to be touched and converted by fine Expressions? Shall God's Minister consider how to *shine* himself, when he is to publish Truths of so sublime and terrible a Nature as those of Christianity? When he is

to speak of God, and all His infinite Perfections; of an eternal Fire for the Impenitent, and an immortal Recompence of Glory for the Righteous; with the Means of avoiding the one, and of obtaining the other!—Truths great and elevated enough of themselves, and which want not the Help of such Arts, and the Ornaments of Rhetoric, to dignify and support them. But this is not to *preach Jesus Christ, but ourselves*, and *ourselves your Servants* indeed, not however to *serve your Souls*, but to gratify and please the *Itching of your Ears*.—A Folly unworthy of a Christian Orator, and unbecoming his sacred Character: And, for my Part, I could never endure to find it in the Pulpit; for I cannot but think, that the Pulpit is a very improper Theatre to be used only for such Purposes and Designs as are altogether profane; *viz.* to make a Fortune, or to procure Patrons; to win Esteem, or get the Name of an ingenious, a genteel, a polite, or pretty *Preacher*.

These Views are all very foreign to his important Business; and therefore so are all your little Sparklings of Stile, all those fine and florid Descriptions, Narrations, and Si-

militudes, which become rather a *Rhetorician* than a *Christian Orator*, and which generally serve to excite, and were intended only to excite, the Admiration, and attract the Applause, of an *injudicious* Audience; yet, such are the distinguished Passages of some celebrated Harangues, which, though they may be, as they are called, *fine Discourses*, yet surely they are *wretched Sermons*.

That alone is a good Sermon, which finds its Way, not to the *Approbation* only, but to the very *Soul*, of the Transgressor; leaves a Sting in his Heart, and infuses into it such a Disposition, as expresses itself not altogether in Encomiums upon the Speaker's Eloquence, but such a one, as makes one take a Pleasure in being affrighted, dejected, dismayed, confounded, and subdued: That Sermon, which, in short, imitates God in his Action upon the Heart of a Sinner, which He first *enlightens*, and then *enlivens* with his *Grace*, and so subdues it.

And, for the same Reason that that Sermon is condemned, which thus addresses itself only to the *Imagination* and Fancy; so also is that other equally to be blamed, which

aims

aims at nothing more than to inform and satisfy the *Reason* of the Hearer; for it is certain the *Understanding* is less faulty than the *Will*; and that the Sinner wants more to be *moved* and *persuaded*, than to be *convinced*. He is already *convinced* of his Duty, but finds in himself no Inclination to *practise* it. Therefore I had rather dismiss such a one with a clamorous Conscience, and a *contrite Heart*, than to feed his Imagination with an empty Satisfaction, and his Ears with an amusing Harmony.

In short, it will be my Business to *preach Jesus Christ*, not with the *enticing Words of Man's Wisdom*, but so as I may instruct and persuade those especially who have most Need to be instructed and persuaded: And, to this End, I shall embellish Truth no further even *here*, than I think necessary to give it an easy Admission with my Hearers; and therefore shall endeavour to adorn its Maxims with no Colours, but such as are inseparable *from*, and peculiar *to*, its genuine Majesty. In other Terms, I shall aim to be easy and natural, and to *profit* my Hearers; and that methinks should be a fair Means to please them too. At least I hope for some

Indulgence from those whose Service I thus endeavour to promote. But,

4. In the last Place, I shall endeavour to acquit myself with all possible *Freedom* and *Impartiality* : As I shall neither flatter, nor be afraid of, the Persons of Men, so neither shall I preach so as to gratify any selfish Design, or little Passion of my own.

How freely did our blessed Saviour deal with the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, and charge their *Hypocrisy* to their very Faces ! How plainly did St. *Paul* treat *Felix* the Governor ! He talked so home to him of *Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, that Felix trembled*. He forgot his Character, dropped his Grandeur, and trembled before his Prisoner. And thus indeed all the Apostles were very free and impartial : they did not shew their Authority most, where there was the least Need of it : They did not discipline the Poor only, and suffer the Rich to be as ungodly as they would : They never concealed any Truth out of Flattery or Fear, but *rebuked very sharply* upon Occasion, and *had no Person in Admiration, because of Advantage*.

And

And now these are the Examples which every *Preacher* ought, and, by the Grace of God, I design still, to follow : I shall lay before you the Good-will of God without Partiality, and without Disguise. In pressing a Duty, or reproving a Sin, I shall have no *Respect to the Persons of Men* : I shall not be gentle out of Favour, nor severe upon any one out of Disaffection. I shall palliate no Sin which you are concerned to forsake, nor conceal any Duty which you are obliged to practise.

In short, my Resolution is, to *preach Jesus Christ*, and endeavour to do you Good, whatever be the Consequence of it to myself.

And thus having dispatched my Second General Head, and given you a short Account of *my Duty*, I come, in the

THIRD Place, to say something to you concerning *your own*. But, before I proceed, I shall crave Leave to make a Reflection or two upon what I have said,

And here I presume, the *Method* which I have proposed will plainly answer my Purpose ; and that you are ready to allow, that whoever does proceed according to these

Particulars, may be truly said to *preach Jesus Christ, and not themselves.*

For, first of all, if we take our Saviour and his Apostles for our Guide, we cannot, I hope, *miscarry* in the *Discharge* of our Duty, how much soever we may *fail* in our *Success*; and, if our *Duty* and *Interest* are blended together, and do *go hand-in-hand*, it is so by Accident, and can never alter the Nature of Things so, as that our Doctrines should be either *true* or *false*, purely because it is our *Interest* to preach them.

For, suppose God Almighty had not *ordained, that those who preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel*: Suppose our Duty and Interest had not been so mingled and joined as they are; yet the Doctrines of the Gospel would still have been *the same*, and whoever would *preach Jesus Christ*, so as to promote the Honour of God, and the Good of his People, would be obliged to proceed in the same Method, which I propose to proceed in: He would be obliged to *preach those Duties most, which Christians are most concerned to practise; and to reprove those Sins most, which are most pernicious and prevailing*: And hence, if such People, who could
have

have *no* Self-interest in the Case, would be obliged to take this Course in preaching *Jesus Christ*, as I have described, it would be very unjust to charge us with *nothing but* Self-Interest, because we take the very same Course.---So again,---a Preacher cannot be justly suspected of mere temporal Interest and Design, if his Discourses are adapted to the meanest Capacity, and because he endeavours to be *familiar* and *plain*. It is presumed, that, in such a refined Age and *Place* as this is, Flights and Flourishes would be most popular and entertaining; a plain Discourse is supposed to betray the Poorness of a Man's Fancy, argues a creeping Spirit, and is seldom deemed edifying; and many People count those low in Learning, who do but stoop to the Capacity of every Hearer.

The Church now-a-days is frequented out of a Desire to hear some *fine* as well as some *new* Things. Peoples Religion is apt to lie chiefly in their Ears; and they measure the Deserts of the *Preacher*, not by the Emotions which his Discourse hath raised in their Souls, not by the spiritual *Profit*, but by the sensual *Pleasure* they have reaped from hearing his Sermons; and, by Consequence, in
such

such a Case, the best Course a Man can take to promote his own Interest, and gain such Peoples Favour and Applause, would be perhaps to lay aside *Jesus Christ*, and preach nothing but *himself*.

And so again, He certainly takes a very untoward Method to promote his own Interest, who resolves to be *free* and *impartial* in his Discourses; to reprove and expose Sin, without any regard to the Persons of Men.

He would certainly better consult his own Ease, and Profit, and Pleasure, if he would conceal some Duties, and soften some Sins, and make it his Business to *prophecy smooth Things*, as the Prophet speaks, and God complains.

But now he that *deals impartially* and *freely* is almost sure oftentimes to offend, yea, and suffer for offending. It is the Preacher's Duty to shew the Opposition there is between the Lives of the Generality of Christians, and the Precepts of the Gospel. He must tell men what they *are*, that they may the better perceive what they *ought to be*. Now this will oblige him to encounter strong *Prejudices*, and speak against pleasing *Customs*, to oppose Peoples *Appetites*, and
cross

cross upon their *Inclinations*, and condemn those Practices which perhaps his dearest Friends are most inclined to follow : And it is presumed a *Preacher* would never take such a Course, if he designed only to *serve himself*. He would not preach Humility to the Proud, Charity to the Covetous, or Chastity to those who live, perhaps, by being otherwise. Faults publicly objected are apt to be rather improved thereby than amended, and to rise in Anger against the Reprover ; and it is no easy Matter to rebuke so as to reform, not exasperate. Correction and Reproof, therefore, are very tender Things, and such as a Minister, *Here* especially, would not care to be concerned in, if he could help it.

Be sure we should never offer to dissuade the great Men from their Debaucheries, nor even the poor Man from his humble Vices, and be blamed for doing so, if it was not to *preach Jesus Christ*, and to approve *ourselves your Servants for Jesus Sake*.

I shall proceed now to my

THIRD general Head — Having laid before you a short Scheme of *my* Duty, I shall
say

say something to you concerning your *own*; and here I shall take Leave to be very free and plain with you.

And, first of all, every Person is obliged, by the Laws of God and Man, to frequent the *Public Worship of Almighty GOD*; nor must every light and frivolous Pretence be thought, by any of you, to be a sufficient Excuse for your Non-Attendance on your proper Minister, in the Place set apart for the Divine Worship, and where God hath promised to bestow on the humble and devout Attendant his most *special Grace, without which we can do nothing*, yea, without which no *natural* Means whatsoever, tho' seemingly the most probable and *promising*, would be available to any saving Purpose. And therefore, tho' some of those, who absent themselves from our religious Assemblies, may *think* themselves, and may *be, wiser than their Teachers*; or may imagine that they can as profitably employ themselves on a *good Book at Home*; yet, if they would be pleased to observe, that they cannot do any thing in the Matter of their own Salvation, without the Assistance of God's most Blessed Spirit, and that

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he annexes a peculiar Portion of his Spirit to the Use of his own Institutions ; that public Preaching is GOD's own Institution ; and that even *the Foolishness of Preaching is ordained to save those that believe* ; that it is of GOD alone, that his Word doth not at any time return to him empty ; that it is He alone, who suffers none of the Words of the greatest Priest or Prophet to fall to the Ground ; and that even his own blessed Word, tho' it be the Power of GOD to Salvation, will appear Foolishness to us, unless it be spiritually discerned by the Help of his Grace, which alone openeth the Heart of any Hearer, as he did that of Lydia to attend to the Things that are spoken ; if, I say, they would but observe this, they must soon be convinced, that the only Way to be better, and wiser too, would be to attend the public Ministry : For, tho' *Abana and Pharpar, Rivers of Damascus*, might seem to be in themselves much clearer and better to cleanse the leprous *Naaman*, than the *Waters of Jordan* ; yet, upon Experiment, the Ordinance of GOD in the one, which is wanting in the other, would make
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such a Difference, as they were before but little aware of.

But, *secondly*, As it is your Duty to attend our Ministry, so it is to hear us with Candour and Ingenuity. You are to lay aside all *Prejudice* and *Passion* ; to take our Admonitions in good part, and not to think yourselves, or your Friends, affronted or abused, as often as your Duty is preached, and your darling Sins exposed : In other Terms, you must weigh our Doctrines impartially, and never be angry with your Minister, and *take him for your Enemy*, because he does his Duty, and *tells you the Truth*.

How far a Minister, by his Misbehaviour, may deserve to lose the Love of the People, and how far they, upon a just Provocation, may withhold their Regard and Esteem for him, I shall not stand to inquire at present ; and I hope you and I shall never have Occasion to inquire at all upon our own Account. However, I must observe to you, that People ought to be very careful, that they do not take more Affronts than are given or designed them. If a Minister exposes and points out any particular Sin, and
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it happens to be the same that some particular Persons in his Congregation are guilty of, they should immediately *turn down a Leaf* in their Hearts, and rejoice, that God's Word had reached them; and should treat the Preacher as a Friend, and love him more especially for his Reproof's Sake; should bless God that they have found one, who has the Courage and Conscience to expose their Sins, and shew them the Danger of them; and not presently to quarrel with their Minister, leave the Public Service of God, or resolve, as the Manner of some is, never to frequent his Church any more.

At this rate all Reproof becomes impracticable; for, should every particular Person, who is concerned in any evil Practice, or is a Friend to those that are concerned, resolve presently to forsake the Church, and *esteem the Minister* an Enemy for inveighing against it; 'tis then impossible that an honest Minister should ever enjoy many Friends: He would quickly have a very thin Congregation; he would not be able to preach against any single Sin, but he must drive some of his People off from the Church. This, you must own, is a very hard Case;

Case; and what makes it the harder is, that 'tis not in our Power to help it.

For we cannot, says the Apostle, but speak the Things which we believed and know; we cannot call Evil Good, and Good Evil; we cannot sew Pillows under Peoples Arms, and disguise the Truth, to make them easy in their Sins.—By no means!—God Almighty will require his Peoples Souls at our Hands; and, if any miscarry because we do not shew them their Duty, and reprove their Sins, their Miscarriage will certainly be charged upon ourselves.

Again, once more, Another Branch of your Duty, and which I am especially concerned to put you in mind of upon this Occasion, is, that you offer up your Supplications and Prayers to Almighty God in my Behalf, that he would enable me to discharge my Office to *his own Glory*, and *your eternal Benefit*.

I beseech you, Brethren, says St. Paul, for the Lord Jesus Christ's Sake, and for the Love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your Prayers to GOD for me. And again: Pray for us, says he, that GOD would open unto us a Door of Utterance to
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Speak the Mystery of Christ, for which I am an Ambassador.

And now, if *St. Paul*, who was *divinely inspired*, and was furnished with many extraordinary *Gifts and Graces*, beseeched his Disciples for the Concurrence of their *Prayers* towards his faithful Discharge of his Ministry; how much more ought a Minister in our Days, and myself especially, to beg and importune the same Assistance; to *desire the Prayers of all good Christians*, and particularly of those who are under his immediate Care?

Our Business is of vast Importance; the eternal Happiness and Misery of Souls depend upon it! and our Abilities are poor and weak, and we are sure to meet with great Opposition. We do not *contend only with Flesh and Blood, but against Principalities, and Powers, and spiritual Wickedness in high Places*. The Devil perhaps is more active and busy in assaulting us, than he is in the assaulting of others; and because he can make the greater Advantage of our Fall.

And hence, as 'tis our Duty to ask, so 'tis certainly your Duty to *offer up* your

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Prayers

Prayers and Supplications for us, that Almighty God would strengthen and assist us, and open our Lips, so that our Mouth may shew forth his Praise; that he would put his Spirit upon us, and give us Wisdom, which all our Adversaries may not be able to resist; that he would write his Laws in our Hearts; and that both by our Preaching and Living, we may set them forth, and shew them accordingly; that we may be apt to teach, patient, in Meekness instructing those who oppose themselves; and, in doing this, may at last save our own Souls, and the Souls of them that hear us.

To conclude all: I beseech you for the Lord Jesus Christ's Sake, whose Gospel I am to preach among you, and for the Love of the Spirit, by whose Assistance I am resolved to do so; that if you have any Regard for him, who is to labour among you, and for you; if you have any Respect to that dreadful Account that he must one Day give of his Ministry; as you tender your own eternal Salvation; as you tender your Instruction, and expect any Comfort and Joy in my Labours; I beseech you, that you approach the Throne of Grace in
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my Behalf, and beg that I may discharge my Office as a good and *faithful Minister of GOD*; that I may be an *happy Pastor* to an *happy People*; and that I may have a joyful Meeting with you another Day, and be able to say, *I have fought a good Fight; I have finished my Course; I have truly and effectually preached Jesus Christ, and myself your Servant for Jesus Sake.*

F I N I S.

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